Old Crow

Walking Tour

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Walking Tour

A short history of Old Crow

Old Crow is named after Chief Crow May I Walk, Deetru' K'avihdik, a respected chief who died in the 1870s. The village of Old Crow is the most northern community in the Yukon and is located at the confluence of the Crow and Porcupine rivers. The area has a record of human occupation that dates back at least 15,000 years and the Vuntut Gwitchin continue to travel over the land trapping, hunting and fishing as part of their lifestyle. John Tizya built a camp at the mouth of the Crow River and this location eventually became the village of Old Crow. Gwitchin Elder John Joe Kaye says that people first lived at Old Crow in 1904 and the first trader opened for business in 1911.

In 1912, three families moved from Rampart House to Old Crow and other Vuntut Gwitchin families followed. In 1918 the Anglican minister, Reverend Toddy, recommended the construction of a mission building as John Tizya was holding services in his house. By this time there were two trading posts in the community. A Vuntut Gwitchin settlement at Rampart House would continue to be active for many years, but more and more people moved to Old Crow and in the 1920s, the church, the school and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police all shifted to the newer community. One reason for the move may have been the restrictions in the movement of goods and people that the newly enforced Canadian/American border established. Elder Charlie Peter Charlie has suggested that the Old Crow trading posts also offered a convenience for the Gwitchin trappers trading their furs after the spring harvest in Crow Flats.

This thriving community of about 300 people is governed by a Vuntut Gwitchin Chief and Councillors.

1) St. Luke's Mission House

St Luke's Mission House was built in 1935. The Anglican Women's Auxiliary use this building to gather in sewing circles. The women sell their handicrafts and hold other fund-raising events in support of the local church. The Women's Auxiliary receive donations of clothing in huge bundles from Anglican Church organizations in the south and hold rummage sales to raise money for the community feasts at Christmas and Easter. Money raised above what is needed in Old Crow is sent outside of the community to wherever it is needed.

2) St. Luke's Anglican Church

St. Luke's Anglican Church was built in 1959 to replace the original church. This building echoes with memories from the past and the voices of those who ministered to the people of the region. Some of the native ministers include John Tizya, William Njootli, James Simon, and Joseph Kyikavichik and his daughter, Ellen Bruce. Reverend Bruce was ordained in Old Crow in 1987 to become the second aboriginal woman in Canada, and the first in northern Canada, to be ordained Priest in the Anglican Church. She was also named to the Order of Canada for her outstanding achievement and service in various fields. Local Deacons continued to provide clergy services for the community after Reverend Bruce retired.

3) Archdeacon McDonald Memorial Church

The first Anglican Church in Old Crow was built in 1926. When the Anglican minister from Rampart House moved his headquarters to Old Crow, around 1923, the congregation built him a residence and he also held services and taught school in that building. In 1926, Reverend A. C. McCullum was ordained in Old Crow and the Archdeacon McDonald Memorial Church was built with local assistance. The old church continues to receive repairs and maintenance although it has not been used as a church since 1959. The people of Old Crow have a strong Anglican heritage dating from the forty-two years that Archdeacon McDonald ministered to this remote area. Robert McDonald became an Anglican priest in 1853 and was posted to the north in 1862. McDonald was a gifted linguist and he translated the Bible, Prayer Book and Hymnal into the local Takudh language. Reverend McDonald married Julia Kutuq in 1876 and their descendants continue to live in the north.

4) Royal Canadian Mounted Police Building

Royal Canadian Mounted Police corporal Arthur B. Thornthwaite arrived at Rampart House in 1926 and patrolled the region from there until 1929, when the detachment moved to Old Crow. The first Old Crow detachment building was a log building constructed by Thornthwaite, Sidney May, and the police carpenter, Special Constable Fox from Dawson. The Rampart House and Old Crow detachment patrolled an area of 17,500 square miles and personnel included two Mounted Police and a Special Constable guide and interpreter. More recently, a local auxiliary person has assisted three RCMP members to operate the station. The oldest building in the compound was built around 1963.

Old Crow Historical Buildings

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1. St. Luke's Mission House
2. St. Luke's Anglican Church
3. Archdeacon McDonald Memorial Church
4. Royal Canadian Mounted Police Building
5. Community Hall
6. Peter Moses Building
7. Sarah Abel Chitze Building
8. Kenneth Nukon Ground Cache
9. Edith Josie House
10. Old Crow Ski Lodge

5) Community Hall

The Community Hall was built in the early 1980s at the centre of the community. Old Crow citizens gather here for meetings, potlatches, annual gatherings, workshops, and dances. Inside, photographs of community Elders, past and present, are hung on the walls.

6) Peter Moses Building

The Peter Moses building was constructed around 1964 and the name commemorates Peter Moses who was a chief in Old Crow for 18 consecutive years. Chief Moses and his people sent relief money to London, England to support the orphaned children who lost parents in the bombing raids during World War II. Chief Peter Moses received the British Empire Medal in 1943, on behalf of his people. The medal, and letters pertaining to it, can be viewed in the Sarah Abel-Chitze Building. The Peter Moses Building was the community hall in the 1960s and then became the Land Claims building until 1998.

7) Sarah Abel Chitze Building

The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation administration office was constructed in 1998 and is named to honour Elder Sarah Abel Chitze, a well-respected spokeswoman for the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. She provided advice and leadership on many issues and concerns. Sarah passed away on August 14, 1998 at the age of 102 years. Her last recorded speech was on her 100th birthday on April 10, 1996. The administration building houses all six Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation government departments: Housing, Finance, Human Resources/Education, Information Systems, Natural Resources, and Social Programs, plus Chief & Council.

8) Kenneth Nukon Ground Cache

This cache belonged to the late Kenneth Nukon and stands today as an icon for a traditional way of life. These types of ground caches were commonly used to store meat, fish and fur supplies as well as those personal belongings that could not be stored inside a house.

9) Edith Josie House

This is the home of Old Crow's most famous journalist. *The Daily News Miner* in Fairbanks, Alaska and the *Whitehorse Star* in Whitehorse started printing Edith Josie's newspaper column "Here are the News" in 1963. She and her parents moved to Old Crow from Eagle, Alaska around 1940 and Edith started her column to let people know the news from Old Crow and to help her people and the community. As she said, "People have to get together and tell funny story and laugh ..." Edith Josie has been nationally recognized, receiving the Canadian Centennial Award in 1967, the Order of Canada in 1995, and a National Aboriginal Achievement Award in 2000.

10) Old Crow Ski Lodge

The Old Crow Ski Lodge is located across the runway from "downtown" Old Crow. In 1972, the ski complex was dedicated to the people of Old Crow and to the loving memory of Dean Feist and Don Doll. Today it is home to the Health and Fitness Program that provides healthy life alternatives for school-aged children. The ski lodge also promotes skiing activities for adults. There are 2km, 5km and 8km ski trails in the foothills behind the lodge.

Crow Mountain Road

The Crow Mountain Road at the north end of the community is a good route for a hike. The road was built over an old existing trail to Crow Flats that the residents of Old Crow people used long ago. Families travelled with dogs, equipped with dog packs, to hunt caribou or pick berries on Crow Mountain. A 2.5 km gravel road winds up to the bottom of Crow Mountain and is accessible year-round. In the fall, this road provides local access for hunting caribou.

Island Trail

This trail is located at the northeast end of the community and leads up to Crow Point. The trail winds along the east side of Old Crow Island and comes back into Old Crow by the slough located below the skating arena.

This brochure was produced with the help of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. Mary Jane Moses and Frances Bruce helped with the research and writing and Tammy Josie contributed photographs for the sketch artist. If you have additional information or corrections regarding the information presented here please contact YTG Cultural Services Branch at (867) 667-3458, or call toll free to 1-800-661-0408.

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